

Celebrating Return to the Birthplace – 70 years later...

A letter to the Family by Richard and Elizabeth Bieniawski

Returning to one's roots is always an emotional experience but when it is for one's 70th Birthday, it is extra special and worth a trip lasting 6-weeks and covering a distance around the Earth at our latitude.

Even more extraordinary was that we were visiting our Polish family after 9 years and discovering in the process the exciting changes that have taken place in Poland, going to cultural and historical places we have not been before, and enjoying that unmatched Polish characteristic: wholehearted hospitality.

1. Know Your Family

There is a whole branch of our Family Tree growing in Poland, with whom we share common values and who are eager to maintain contact with their American branch. Let's recall that GrandDaddy **Taddy** (in Poland he is called *Dziadek*) remarried in 1967 (Granny **Alicia** died in 1960) the lovely **Marysia** Jędrzejowską (in Polish, the name *Bieniawski* is for the male gender only, the female form being *Bieniawska*). Granny Marysia's only daughter **Zosia** thus became Dad's step-sister, much to their mutual delight; Dad always wanted to have a sister and she a brother.

In 1969, Zosia – a talented TV journalist – married **Jurek** Waszczuk, then the Chief-of-Staff to Poland's President, Edward Gierek. Their three children, **Michał**, **Justyna** and **Ola** (Aleksandra) and are your first cousins, with Michał marrying **Lila** (Liliana) five years ago. All of them are university educated, speak English and Russian, and have thriving professional careers. And they have a good knowledge of who is who in the Bieniawski family as Dad came equipped with photographs from our Reunion. Most of all, please remember that Aunt Zosia is Alec's Godmother.

The senior Waszczuks, now retired, live in the capital city *Warszawa* while Granny (*Babcia*) Marysia lives in Muszyna, a charming village in the Carpathian region close to Poland's southern border.

Being *Wujek* (Uncle) and *Ciocia* (Auntie) and *Zdzisiu* and *Elżunia* for six weeks brought us lots of sentiment and pleasure and Mum excelled in displaying her skills in Polish much to the admiration of her audience.

In summary, we felt very much at home with Zosia and Jurek and their offspring; over the many delicious meals cooked by Zosia, we laughed a lot and discussed every subject under the sun, reinforced by generous doses of *świderek* cocktails and *shandy*...

2. Living in *Kraków* (Cracow)

Our visit to Poland started with a welcome by Zosia at the international airport at *Kraków*, the city where Dad was born on October 1, 1936. *Kraków* is the former medieval capital of Poland and is the gem of Central Europe - beats Prague, Vienna and Budapest any time. Trust us, we visited all three! *Kraków*, located on the great Vistula (*Wisła*) river, is unique because of its joyful, pulsating atmosphere, charming medieval sights (Castle, Dragon, *Heynał* and *Lajkonik!*), superb restaurants, best-in-the-world taxi system, and still reasonably sized crowds of sightseekers. And the tales of *King Krak*, *Princess Wanda* and the adventures of *Twardowski* and *Mephistopheles* can be heard as you stroll the city...

Since Dad insisted on living in “his” city, we spent one full week in *Kraków* having rented a nice hotel apartment in the city center. In our opinion, seven days are our recommended minimum (yet organized bus tours allow only two days!).

While in *Kraków*, we paid respects to the graves of Great Grandfather **Hugo** von Preinl and Auntie **Sidi** (Granny Alicia’s sister and Dad’s Godmother) who are buried in the local cemetery. With the help of a taxi driver, we found the very maternity clinic where Dad was born at the University Hospital on 23 Copernicus Street. Wow, that was a moving moment!

We wandered through the musea, did some shopping in the famous *Sukiennice* Cloth Hall, listened to street music in sidewalk beer/coffee gardens, rode in a horse-drawn carriage and ate at superb restaurants; for example, *Wierzynek’s* Chamber of Knights (*Sala Rycerska*), *Pod Aniołkami*, *Chłopskie Jadło*, *Mieszkańska*, *C.K. Browar* and *Pod Różą*.

We also toured the *Wawel Castle*, located by the river on a hill underneath which lived the legendary dragon *Smok*, and we saw him breathe fire! For the best view we climbed the highest mound in the city, *Kościuszko Kopiec*, and strolled the streets of the suburb *Kazimierz*, where Jewish streets (*Rabina Meiselsa*) meet those with Catholic names (*Corpus Christi*) - such was the closeness of the two communities. While there we visited Schindler’s factory where the movie *Schindler’s List* was filmed.

Most of all, we were awed by the Basilica of St. Mary (*Bazylika Mariacka*), dating back to 1222, located on the city square, and featuring the world-famous and enormous medieval altar carved in wood in 1477 by master *Wit Stwosz* who came to the city from Nuremberg. It is considered the best achievement of European carving in the Middle Ages. Words cannot describe the feeling when attending a Holy Mass and sitting, as we did, in the front pews of the bishops enclosure and hearing the powerful 16th century organ.

We were so enchanted with *Kraków* that we firmly believe that this is the prime city to enjoy in Central Europe and the Polish tourist industry should do more to promote its great potential.

Another aspect most noticeable on arrival in Poland was the impeccable courtesy and politeness which were exhibited everywhere from waiters and shop assistants to taxi drivers, street vendors, museum guides and ordinary people whom we asked for street directions. This was in sharp contrast to what we observed in Prague.

3. Health Resort and Spa in Krynica *Uzdrowisko*

Our special health treat was spending a week in a mountain spa resort famous for its miraculous mineral springs, called *Sanatorium Uzdrowiskowe*. It has a lovely location in the Carpathians in the south of Poland, close to Muszyna where Granny Marysia lives. There we selected a package deal including lodging, all meals, mineral waters to drink, and a medical examination and referrals to nurses and physiotherapists providing a variety of *daily* treatments to rejuvenate our muscles and bones, such as body massage, ultrasonics, physiotherapy, and gym exercises. In fact, these treatments took the whole morning and, after lunch, a nap was mandatory, leaving just enough time for walking and strolling in the nearby park and forest. After dinner, we went for another stroll or danced in one of the cafés or beerhalls.

We must add there were many other treatments available that we could not fit in or just avoided, such as mud baths, or those suspiciously called the “Scottish Whip” (*Bicze Szkockie*) and the “Arizona (!) Sands” (*Piaski Aryzony*). The first was a form of pulsating high-pressure shower, the other a dry high-temperature sauna with air passing through hot sand imported from Arizona thus “guaranteeing the cleanest air!”

The meals in the *Sanatorium* were dietary but not dieting, meaning that they were healthy, as decided by the resident nutritionist, but tasty and sufficient with NO ALCOHOL permitted on the premises. So, Dad distinguished himself by going dry for seven days! Instead we were encouraged to drink the not-too-nicely smelling mineral waters; seven different types to choose from!

We thought the whole week at this spa was a lot of fun and we met many interesting people and learned lots of fascinating things particularly as our stay coincided with the Economic Forum for Central Europe held in Krynica for 1,880 delegates from 36 countries. In the process, we actually saw the current Prime Minister of Poland, *Jarosław Kaczyński* walking by and we shook hands with the outgoing President of Poland, *Aleksander Kwaśniewski*.

The majority of attendees at the *Krynica Sanatorium Spa* were women, age 45 to 60, and there being a distinct shortage of men, we were told that most of them were actually regulars coming there to hunt for men! Needless to say that Dad received prime attention to such an extent that, at one stage, Mum had to act resolutely to prevent two women crashing to our table under frivolous excuses!

And again, during our whole stay at the *Sanatorium* we met this superb courtesy and politeness from everyone on the staff including our charming physiotherapist *Panna Sylvia*, through *Pani Doctór* to *Pani Dyrektorka*. Even the security men (present there during the international Economic Forum) and bus drivers were most polite.

4. Excursions and Entertainment

In our previous tour of Poland, we traveled to well-known places such as *Wieliczka* (famous ancient salt mine), *Częstochowa* (a sacred monastery and sanctuary to Our Lady the Queen of Poland), *Auschwitz-Oświęcim* (Nazi extermination camp), *Wadowice* (where Pope John Paul II was born) and to *Zakopane* (a mountain jewel in the high *Tatras*).

This time we selected additional venues and, before leaving America, we bought a *Rail Pass for Central Europe* and used it effectively to make 10 train trips (!), for excursions to Krynica and Prague, from Prague to Warszawa, and from Warszawa to Toruń, Gdańsk, and Malborg. To Prague and back we traveled overnight in a sleeper but were surprised to be awakened in the middle of the night by the Czech border police demanding to see our passports. And we thought we were in the borderless European Union! On other routes, Polish trains were comfortable and very punctual but the train stations lacked escalators, which was tough for carrying suitcases.

In **Warszawa**, one highlight was a bus trip to *Żelazowa Wola*, where **Fryderyk Chopin** (1810-1849) was born. We spent most of a day there touring the Chopin Homestead Museum and being treated to a piano concert of his music in the park. Other attractions in the capital city were *Stare Miasto* and *Zamek Królewski* (Old City and the Royal Palace), as well as the excellent *Museum of the Warsaw Uprising*, so recently opened that even our family was visiting it for the first time. On the day of my 70th Birthday, thanks to my sister Zosia, a special Holy Mass was dedicated to me in the Warsaw *ArchCathedral of St. John*, located next to the Old City Square. It was a very moving moment for me, attended by the whole family.

The excursion to **Toruń** was selected because it is the birth city of **Mikołaj Copernicus** (1473-1543), the great astronomer who “stopped the Sun and moved the Earth” in his masterpiece *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, published in 1543. We loved that charming medieval city located on the majestically flowing river *Wisła*, and we cannot understand why it is not on the regular tourist route through Poland because Toruń has a magnificent cathedral far more imposing than that of St. Vitus in Prague. It also has a number of medieval musea, of which the Copernicus Museum is most fascinating and reveals the multifaceted activities of Copernicus not only as a renowned astronomer and mathematician but also as a priest, doctor of canon law, skilled physician, city mayor, and... an artillery captain in charge of the fortifications while defending his city from a Teutonic siege.

Another most worthwhile excursion was to **Gdańsk**, a beautiful port on the Baltic Sea, famous for its medieval *Ulica Długa* (Long Street) and for being the main center of trade in amber, dating back to the Hanseatic League in the 14th century. Most of all, it boasts (still) the best Polish Technical University (Politechnika Gdańska), according to the 2003 report by *Newsweek Europe*. There, Dad studied naval architecture and marine engineering (*Budowa Okrętów Morskich*) during 1955-58 and

earned his sailing license as a yachting skipper. He also served as a naval cadet on the tall ship *Dar Pomorza* and earned his commission as a 2nd lieutenant. So, we had to visit the Port of **Gdynia** and the destroyer-museum *ORP Błyskawica* and *Dar Pomorza* (now also a museum) as well as the beach resort of **Sopot** where Dad patronized the *Molo* cafés in his student days.

Malborg, another historical city in the north of Poland, was selected for yet another excursion because it has the largest medieval castle in the whole of Europe (and 3rd largest in the world), famous as the seat of the Order of the Teutonic Knights. It is a grand structure of three castles in one, each surrounded by a moat, and dating back to 1274. The guide informed us that we covered 5 miles on this unforgettable visit, tough on the feet but exciting for the mind. We had to go there because Mum has recently finished reading the classic *Teutonic Knights* by Henryk Sienkiewicz, and we also saw the movie based on his book; afterwards we spent many moments of discussions within the family about this historical period culminating in the great medieval battle in 1410 when at Grunwald, Prussia, the Polish and Lithuanian armies defeated the powerful Teutonic Knights, from which the order never recovered and Malborg became a Polish possession with access to the sea.

We toured Gdańsk and Malborg with Ola who proved to be a wonderful companion and we had much fun together discussing college education issues, Polish history, Life and Love, and...the best places to eat! She gave us the great pleasure of treating her like a *surrogate* daughter of our own (*córeczka*).

Another excursion was to **Prague**, in *Republika Czeska*, which is heavily promoted by most tour organizers so we spent four days there. Big mistake! Well, we “did” all the sights in the book, *Stare Miasto*, the *Astronomy Clock*, *Hradczany* Castle and *St. Vitus* Cathedral, but we found the city overrated, with unbearable crowds, exorbitant prices, cheating taxi drivers and rude waiters. We were told that Prague has changed for the worse in the last three years and now its inhabitants are just interested in making quick money wherever possible.

Concerning cultural **entertainment** in Poland, our highlight was a private piano recital of Chopin’s music at the *Royal Łazienki Palace* in Warszawa, where in a grand salon, surrounded by marble sculptures of Zeus and Apollo, a professor of music from the Warsaw Conservatory gave a spirited performance of Chopin’s polonaises and mazurkas. We were alerted to that concert by Lila, a tourist specialist herself, and attended the performance with Zosia who, with her usual ingenuity, secured our reservations and transportation. Of course, we three went elegantly dressed but discovered much to our horror that all other attendees were dressed most casually, to say the least, as appropriate for a bunch of bussed in foreign tourists, including a smattering of Americans. Ouch!

Nevertheless this concert as well as our previous visit to Chopin’s birthplace, provided us with deep intellectual discussions around the dinner table with Zosia and Jurek about the life and achievements of this famous composer. We discovered that Zosia is an authority on Chopin having just translated, from the French, a memoir by

George Sand of her life with Chopin. Zosia, a graduate from Sorbonne and a syndicated journalist by profession, has worked on this difficult translation for 10 years! Jurek, on the other hand, is a walking encyclopedia on Polish history and politics and fascinated us with details on the time of the Polish *Grande Emigreé (Wielka Emigracja)* in Paris in the 19th century when Chopin, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and other Polish patriots and artists created, composed and wrote dreaming about their Motherland plunged in the depths of partitions lasting 123 years (1795 to 1918). As Mum and I remembered vividly visiting the Chopin and Sand Museum on the island of Mallorca, Spain, last year, these conversations with Zosia and Jurek constituted our stimulating and enjoyable entertainment while in Poland.

Our final excursion and entertainment, too, was to **Grybów** where Dad spent his childhood and teenage years before leaving to attend college. We went there for a day by taxi from Krynica to admire his “beloved“ high school which provided him with an outstanding education, no longer possible within the current Polish or American secondary education curriculum. In essence, he had what is nowadays known as the *international baccalaureate* - too expensive to maintain today. We found the house where he and his parents lived when he was a baby (very fancy), where he and Granny Alicia lived during the war (very poor), and we found his elementary school and the park where he played soccer. We also went to say a prayer at the impressive gothic church, the landmark in this town, where Dad was baptized and served as an altar boy.

The amusing aspect while in *Grybów* was spending half the time driving around looking for a *Czerwona Góra*, a “most important“ mountain from which Dad skied – he says - into daring depths...; we found it and it turned out to be just a respectable hill... But the view from the top was indeed spectacular!

5. Paying Respect to the Departed

We had a number of sad missions to undertake to pay respects to the memories of our loved ones who are buried in various parts of Poland. In Muszyna, with Granny Marysia and with Zosia, we placed flowers and lit candles at the grave of Granddaddy Taddy (*Dziadek*). Thanks to Marysia, he has an imposing monument in a lovely and peaceful church cemetery.

Then we rode to *Stary Sącz*, by taxi from Muszyna, to pray at the grave of Granny *Alicia* and her mother *Anna Charwat von Preinl*, of Austria. Alicia died in Africa but her ashes were brought to Poland by Granddaddy Taddy and placed in her family grave. Also, nearby are buried other members of Dad’s family, namely, his maternal grandmother *Karolina* and her family.

Dad remembered very well the location of the graves in *Stary Sącz*, this being his 5th such visit, so he was confident that the same would apply when we went to *Prokocim*, near Kraków, to visit the graves of Grandfather *Hugo von Preinl* and his daughter, our Auntie *Sidi*. But there we faced a mystery. The resting place of Hugo could not be found! His tombstone has just disappeared! We had to go to the offices of

the municipal cemeteries in Kraków to find the records of the burial and determine what had happened. Well, after a long wait, thanks to modernization and computerization of the records, the helpful office manager found everything; the lease of Hugo's exclusive grave has expired and another deceased (a relation of his) has been added to his tomb and when the new headstone was installed five years ago, Hugo's name was omitted. Nevertheless, we obtained the exact location of that grave and ascertained that this was indeed the original location, and paid our respects to both *Grandfather Hugo* as well as that of Antie *Sidi* and her husband. Both graves are in excellent condition. Sidi's grave was looked after by her niece, *Renata Preinl*, who will take care that Hugo's name is replaced on his tomb.

We would not have been able to achieve all this, had it not been for a most resourceful taxi driver who knew where the cemetery offices were and how to negotiate with the computer manager!

6. Pizza-and-Beer Gathering with the Young People (*Spotkanie z Młodzieżą*)

Being the parents of young people and the grandparents of fast growing children, we decided to have a Pizza-and-Beer evening with our *Młodzieżą* (our nephew, three nieces and one of their friends) to learn about their problems and aspirations and to exchange open views on politics in Poland, new Europe and America. It was a fascinating experience particularly that we were dealing with a group that has traveled widely all over Western Europe (Michał and Lila), some even lived in England for a year (Ola) while another (Paweł, Ola's friend) even studied in the USA. Unfortunately, Justyna, who is the 2nd Secretary at the Polish Embassy in Moscow, and also travels a lot as a diplomat, could not attend that meeting but was joining us later.

Many views expressed were similar to those heard during our family reunion in July, such as disdain for some government policies, U.S. and Polish, but one of the major issues was why so many well educated young people are leaving Poland (one million to date!) to seek better paid jobs in the European Union, Poland's role in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the lack of appreciation and "off-set" business on the part of the USA for Poland's support of America's war on terrorism. USA still requires entry visas by Polish citizens while the other "old" European Union countries do not have to do so. And, of course, nobody likes President Bush and the situation in Iraq!

We were asked an interesting question whether we lived in constant fear in America because of the terrorist threat and when we told them "no" and that we even sometimes forget to lock our home in Arizona – they were surprised. We also pointed out that the Polish, as well as European press, often have a mistaken view of American society and the system of government, particularly that Congress is also responsible for the foreign policy (they typically think that all American political parties are conservative and there are NO liberal, leftist tendencies in American political circles). When told that the American universities and the media are highly liberal and secular and "political correctness" rules, we had some heated discussions – but all in an

enjoyable atmosphere of mutual respect. The gathering concluded when we ran out of beer, even if lots of pizza was still left!

7. Polish Delicacies

“*Food, glorie-os food!*” was Charles Dickens’ most famous dictum and it can truly be applied to what we found in Poland. Of course, Mum is most skillful in being able to cook any Polish dish that Dad remembers, but when this art is combined with the outstanding cooking by sister Zosia, who responded enthusiastically to the Dad’s every culinary request, we had a feast of feasts!

So, you the reader, think you know Polish cooking by loving *pierogi*, *barszcz z uszkami* and *kielbasa* or *gołąbki*? Bless you, but these are just.... *zakąski* (appetizers).

“Real” Polish food that we enjoyed from Zosia’s kitchen was: *zrazy*, schab cutlet, trout (caught that morning!) and – for breakfast - *jajka sadzone* (eggs, “sitting” on ham, laid this morning!). And her *kapusta* and *grzybki* were out of this world... [Now, please don’t look for translations of these dish names here! Do your part by looking it up in your Polish cookery book...]

Elsewhere, when we went to Polish restaurants, our special dishes were: for Dad – unobtainable in America: sautéed *sturgeon* (!)*, roast goose and crème-de-la-crème venison: *comber z dzika po myśliwsku*. For Mum, her culinary choice was: duck, veal and fresh *borowiki* or *rydze* mushrooms (picked in the forest that morning!). Both of us adored *kremówki* (a cream custard pastry, known as *Pope John Paul II’s* favorite), the best of which were discovered by Jurek in Krynica in a café called *Wista*.

But there were also most humble dishes which Dad remembered from his youth and Zosia promptly provided them: *karp smarzony*, *nowe ziemniaki z kwaśnym mlekiem*, *kiszka (kaszanka)* and white-skin apples called *papierówki*. But finally, Dad got rid of his ambition to find the ‘great smelly’ cheese called *kwargle* (which his Austrian grandfather Hugo served him with beer, at age 14, when *Mamusia Alicia* wasn’t looking). We found it!... in Toruń... and it was so smelly that even Mum, who will even eat *limburger*, nixed it - with or without beer...

8. General Impressions

Firstly, I must note – as a connoisseur of female beauty – that Poland must have the prettiest girls in Europe and their lovely figures are a delight to admire. They certainly have blossomed since my last visit nine years ago! Is it due to better living conditions? Better skin care? Or is it due to keeping fit and happy? Anyhow, God bless those lovely creatures!

Secondly, this being our longest EVER trip, six weeks on the road, we are amazed that we never got sick or had any problems so long away from home. What did

* They say that STURGEON is a fish two million years old and it has NO bones, only cartilages.

help was that we allowed, each week, one day of rest completely free of any appointments and used it to rest and relax, doing a lot of reading of local press in Polish and in English. I found that such Polish publications as the daily *Rzeczpospolita* and the weekly magazines *Wprost*, *Polityka* and *Angora* are excellent. We didn't watch much TV but found the CNN Europe most unsatisfactory because of its usual bias and poor coverage; also why use announcers from England with atrocious accents on an American network?

Once again, we are most grateful to our Polish family who went out of their way to please us, to assist us, and to make sure we enjoyed ourselves. Well, we did!

A feminine note:

"A nation's history is determined by its geography". Did I read this somewhere or 'make it up' as Dad would say, but how true in the case of Poland (the size of New Mexico)! We traveled by train North & South and East & West and most of it was flat. "Poland" derives from the word 'pole' meaning 'field'. Mountains are present only in the South: the Carpathians and the high Tatras. The average Tatra elevation is some 2,000 m above sea level which is exactly what we live at in Prescott, Arizona (6,000 ft).

Not even stone dykes/walls can be seen to slow down cavalry or tanks, just the vast fertile plain of the river Wisła (Vistula) flowing from the Carpathians through Kraków, then Warszawa, Toruń and into the Baltic – nearly 400 miles to the north!

There have been tremendous changes since my last visit 15 years ago. People are well-dressed and very cheerful. The variety of food is mouthwatering. In a supermarket – Tesco, a British chain – just one block from Zosia's apartment – one can choose from six kinds of smoked fish (including my beloved Scottish kippers!); umpteen kinds of sea and river fish, all fresh, not frozen; hams, patés, salamis, sausages, kielbasy, kabanosi - in addition to our rather dull ham, beef or turkey – at least 30 to 40 different choices!

Polish people eat a lot of deli-style meats, at both breakfast and supper (kolacja). Even in a small village like Muszyna, where Babcia Marysia lives, population 3,000, there are three or more small shops selling cold meats, cheeses, and the variety of fresh fruit and vegetables that we have here. Prices are about 1/3 of what we pay. Dad could pick up fresh kaizerki rolls, a couple of slices of ham and cheese, all the best quality – for our breakfast – for only 5 zloty (~\$1.50). Alas, this will change; as we saw in Spain, EU pricing creeps in pretty fast especially if Poland adopts the euro.

*Staying in Ola's apartment in **Kabaty**, a new suburb south of Warsaw, gave us a novel insight into European urban life at its best. Each 'complex' – really a cluster of apartment blocks, only three stories high – is gated off from a central pedestrian mall, full of small shops and restaurants, all beautifully landscaped with fountains, flowers and shrubs. There are a number of these clusters grouped around this mall, housing in all some 12,000 people. Typically European in size, the apartments range from about 750-900 square ft (75m² to 90m²), amazing that you can fit a kitchen, a bathroom and two additional rooms into that space! Why, in America, do we need a 3,000 sq.ft (300m²) house to live in for two persons?*

However, there is no open 'green space' in those complexes but the huge Kabaty Forest, full of trails, is only a mile away, an easy bike ride! With the metro two blocks away who needs a car? Nobody in the family has one! For trips out of town, a car and a driver can be hired for about \$25 an hour. Dad loved it, but I think I would feel a bit claustrophobic after a while – give me, the gardener, "land, lots of land" ...

*Everybody raves about **Prague** but I was disappointed – it is overrated and cluttered with tour groups of every conceivable nationality, and with mostly older people. **Kraków** was crowded, too, but with young people. As Kraków is just as attractive, I'm afraid it also will become another tourist trap very soon. Pity!*

*Dad's **70th Birthday party** was a huge success, thanks to Zosia! She organized it all, starting with a Mass in his honor at the Cathedral in the Rynek, the central square in the Old Town in Warsaw, then across the square to a banquet in a private room at a well-known first class restaurant "**Literatka**".*

There, a beautifully decorated table, complete with cold appetizers was waiting for us, this being followed by a hot appetizer, kurki in cream (i.e. chanterelles, much prized

wild mushrooms, not unlike our oyster mushrooms). Next came roast veal on apple pancakes (which looked like „placki“). A dish of apple dumplings was served as the dessert but – wait, there was more! – next came the „piece de resistance“, Dad's favorite: tort orzechowy (layered walnut cake). Wow, what a veritable feast, not to mention the fabulous Russian champagne we drank, a present from Justyna, which she brought in her diplomatic bag from Moscow!

All in all, we came back with a feeling of having been wined and dined by Zosia and Jurek in the best Polish tradition and we enjoyed every moment of it. We have also learned many new things about Polish history and culture. Most of all, it was fun!

10. In closing

One might ask, *What did we bring with us from Poland?* Well, we did bring something very special but not what you might expect!

My treasures were: a bottle of home-made *Wódka Orzechowa*, which can't be bought in stores and was made to Marysia's order by her friend *Elunia*; a bottle of rare, also home-made, pickled *rydze* mushrooms (to go with those vodka...); and my wonderful birthday present from the whole Family: an elegant jewelry set of bar utensils consisting of eight chrome pieces for opening and serving fine wines – a beauty!

Mum brought with her – also courtesy of the generous Family - a lovely necklace with a matching bracelet of amber and numerous samples of the best Polish chocolates.

Well, we did buy some souvenirs: little ones for the Christmas tree and the Easter table and a magnificent *Krakowianka* dress for one of our granddaughters.

Remarkably of their hospitality, the whole family was present to say *Farewell* to us a 5:45 am in the morning! *Dziękujemy bardzo!*